24: Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

by the *ororo* and *kwareth* of Fashoda, a ceremony which I did not attend, though I had seen it done at the installation of *reth* Anei.

If there are any observations to be made on this day's events, they are that the whole occasion was carried out in a much less serious manner than previously. The participants appeared to be light-hearted and the dangers to the *reth*, though carefully stressed, were obviously not taken so seriously. If there is any explanation of this, it is probably that the Shilluk, who have undergone the very real strain of no less than three installations in the last seven years, are now used to these events and do not regard them with such awe as before. It is also possible that Kur, as the son of a successful and popular father, was a candidate accepted with a greater degree of unanimity and calm than either of his two immediate predecessors. The number of participants seemed much less than before, possibly for the reasons already given, and because many people from the south were barred from coming owing to cerebro-spinal meningitis. One had the impression that the number of Nyikang's followers was much greater than those of the *reth*, no doubt partially due to the latter's unexpected decision to stay only one night in Debalo and the fact that this affected his own followers rather than those of Nyikang who had marched through the northern Shilluk. Also, perhaps, because Kur, as son of Fafiti, is popular in the north while he may be less so in the south.

I was not able to attend the final ceremonies. In the account by Mr. Udal which follows, it will be seen that *reth* Kur spent only one night up in the mound of *Athurwic*, with the result that the ceremonies of installation from the point where he fled to Debalo had taken only five days instead of the customary nine.

THE FINAL CEREMONIES

(By J. O. Udal)

The Battle for Nyakwer

The *reth* was anxious to avoid any further delays and decided to spend only one night in *Athurwic*. The battle for *Nyakwer* thus took place on the third day of the installation ceremonies, not on the fourth as is usual. I arrived at about 8 a.m. on the morning of the third day and was able to exchange greetings with the *reth* from a distance although he could not leave *Athurwic: jago* Yorleiker *wad* Ajang thought that the battle would begin very soon, but the inevitable delays followed and it was not until about 9.15 a.m. that Nyikang's drum was heard being beaten in his shrine. The *kwa* Nyikwom began to assemble outside the shrine from which Nyikang and Dak soon emerged and with them *Nyakwer*, dressed in a Mrs. Gray antelope skin. *Nyakwer* is the central figure of the second battle. In the morning, the *reth*, remembering *Nyakwer*, whom he had forsaken for a girl of the *ororo*, sent for her. The news was brought that Nyikang had abducted her and an ultimatum was forthwith sent by the *reth* to Nyikang demanding her immediate return. Both sides then prepared for battle.

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763 confession was an easy task now, and I gave her Holy
*797 Viaticum and then proceeded to anoint her. As I did so she stirred feebly, tried to raise herself up and twisted her shoulder towards me. 'Father,' she said 'put some there. That's where the pain is.'

*797 Epidemics sometimes visit the district and then the
731 missionary is very busy indeed. Devastating though they
164 may be, carrying off both young and old, the strong as well as the weak, they can have a chastening effect on the lazy, indifferent and careless. On one occasion I stood in the dark behind a hut, whilst mosquitoes in their thousands whined and buzzed and bit, hearing a panic-stricken man's confession. Within the hut, his wife, his little daughter and infant son, all newly baptized, lay dying. The sickness had not touched him, but its visitation to his home did what years of coaxing, prodding and reminding had failed to do.

164 A primitive people like the Shilluk fall an easy prey to
744 whatever sickness is going. Not overclean in their persons and insanitary in their habits, they huddle together at night in small windowless huts with the doorway blocked by a heavy grass mat; hence disease quickly spreads from person to person, from hut to hut and from village to village. Medical facilities are limited and an epidemic can get a good hold before effective reinforcements can be sent from Malakal, sixty miles away, to help the overworked Medical Assistant. During my first years at Detwok, cerebro-spinal meningitis was a regular annual visitor. It came when the rains ceased, and with the first showers of the next rainy season it disappeared again, but during the intervening months it did its deadly work and scarcely a day passed without some village mourning its dead. An effective remedy was found, however, in a spinal injection of the famous 'M & B' drug, and the scourge lost much of its terror. After 1942 it failed to put in its annual appearance, and to date Detwok and district has been free of it altogether, although yearly it makes its presence felt in the southern end of the province, and takes a deadly toll in other provinces in the Sudan.

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In September 1944 a new sickness swept through the country. One evening I received a sick call from a village some four miles to the south of Detwok. Just as I was setting out another message came in from a village equally distant from this mission, but to the north. It so chanced that I was alone in the mission at the time so that the two calls from opposite directions put me in something of a quandary, since the rains were on and I could not use a bicycle. However, the call from the south appeared to be the more urgent of the two, so I went there and sent a catechist north to do whatever he could. When I arrived at my destination, I was appalled at what I found. It was not one person who was ill, but a dozen or so, including three in the house to which I had been called. (It was on this occasion that after I had baptized his wife and children the terrified husband asked me to hear his confession on the spot.) I found the same in the other villages nearby, and when I met my catechist that night he had a similar tale to report from the north. I immediately sent a runner to Kodok to wire the news through to Malakal, surmising that the outbreak was one of cerebro-spinal meningitis, since the symptoms seemed to be similar, though I was puzzled at its appearance during the rains. Prompt help was forthcoming from Malakal. The following day a launch brought a doctor and a team of assistants, and the outbreak was diagnosed as relapsing fever. It is a disease carried by lice. The person infected becomes ill and is very seedy for about a week; then he recovers and apparently is as well as ever, but after a short interval he is stricken down again, and unless medical assistance is at hand, death generally follows. Fortunately, medical assistance was at hand, and although, owing to the sickness becoming widespread so rapidly, many succumbed to it, very many were saved thanks to the immediate action taken by the medical authorities.

The major problem was how to stamp out this plague which had originated somewhere round Kaka and advanced south with great rapidity. Squads of soldiers and public health workers were sent to the district and they toured the

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villages, boiling, disinfecting or burning anything that could harbour the deadly lice. It was a long struggle, and the sickness had spread south of Lul and managed to get a hold on the Malakal side of the river before it was finally destroyed.

In the mission, we fought long and unceasingly, and happily, not unsuccessfully, to keep the fever at bay. Naturally in the school we had always maintained a very high standard of cleanliness. A morning bath for the children had always been enforced, their clothes had to be washed every Saturday, and classrooms and dormitories were swept and dusted daily. But we multiplied our efforts; the pupils' heads were kept shaved, and their clothes, blankets and mosquito nets were boiled. They were deprived of all beads, bracelets and trinkets—anything indeed where lice could find refuge. Stripped of their adornments for the first time, they appeared to be really naked, and they, and we, lived in a perpetual cloud of D.D.T. powder. As far as possible the villages were put out of bounds and the children's activities confined to the area between the mission and the river. Thanks to all these precautions only two boys went down with the sickness. These were promptly and rigorously isolated and, receiving immediate medical attention, both recovered.

Since the passing of the relapsing fever epidemic the district has been free from any serious outbreak of sickness. Every year, however, from November to March, when the really cold North wind comes howling across the country, many people, particularly among the old folk, get pneumonia, and the priest is ever on the alert for the knock on his door and the summons which may take him but ten minutes to answer, or on the other hand may mean a journey of twenty miles or more, and occupy him the best part of the day.